

## N E W S   R E L E A S E

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### **Cal/OSHA Cites Agricultural Firm after Explosion Kills Worker, Burns Resident and Home**

**Bakersfield**—Cal/OSHA has cited Big & Deep Ag Development Company for serious safety violations following an investigation into a November 13, 2015 explosion in Bakersfield that killed a bulldozer operator and destroyed a nearby residence, resulting in injuries to the occupants including serious burns and smoke inhalation.

Big & Deep had been hired to prepare land near Wible Road for planting almond trees, an activity known as “soil ripping.” In this case, the field was being ripped to a depth of 5.5 feet. PG&E had previously placed flags in the ground to identify an underground high pressure pipeline in the area in response to Big & Deep alerting the utility to the planned dig.

Cal/OSHA’s inspectors found that Big & Deep, also known as Jeff Alexander Farming, had not trained the bulldozer operator on the hazards of underground utilities or warned him about the location of a natural gas pipeline near the area he was working. During soil ripping operations, the bulldozer’s attached shank pierced the “high priority” pipeline resulting in ignition of natural gas under pressure.

“Employers are required to train workers to recognize and avoid hazards that could endanger their lives,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. “Big & Deep Ag Development was aware of the pipeline’s location and failed to protect their employee and nearby residents from the danger.”

Cal/OSHA issued a total of three workplace safety citations to Big & Deep Ag Development Company, with proposed penalties of \$40,250. Two of the citations are serious, with one being serious and accident-related. These involved Big & Deep’s failure to train the bulldozer operator, or to correct unsafe workplace conditions. This employer had pierced the same gas line on a different piece of property in October 2014. That incident did not result in any injuries. A third citation, classified as willful, was issued because the permit to conduct this work had expired.

A serious violation is cited when there is a realistic possibility that death or serious harm could result from the actual hazardous condition. A willful violation is cited when the employer is aware of the law and violates it nevertheless, or when the employer is aware of the hazardous condition and takes no reasonable steps to address it.

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

Members of the press may contact Julia Bernstein or Peter Melton at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to [subscribe to get email alerts](#) on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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